

led the Senate's efforts through the U.S./Russian Agreement on Highly Enriched Uranium to secure 500 tons of this material from Russia, enough for perhaps 20,000 bombs.

More recently, Senator DOMENICI has focused his attention on 50 tons of weapons-grade plutonium that Russia has declared to be surplus; that's enough material for almost 10,000 nuclear weapons. He has led efforts to ensure that this surplus plutonium won't present us with a future threat.

His trips to Russia, first last July with Senator THOMPSON and Senator GRAMS, and then more recently to the Moscow Summit, focus on this issue. Through those trips, Senator DOMENICI is well known to the leadership of the Russian weapon programs. His proposals for rapid progress on this surplus plutonium have been thoroughly studied throughout the world, from Japan to France.

Senator DOMENICI discussed his proposals with President Clinton in late July and encouraged that plutonium disposition be a focus of this past Summit. The protocol on plutonium disposition at the Moscow Summit is an important first step, but it is only the first step.

We have to go far beyond just signing the protocol to secure the benefits that it can provide—to ensure that the material is never rebuilt into weapons or found in the hands of terrorists or rogue states. Furthermore, the Senate needs to advise the Administration on the detailed agreements that will enable real progress.

Today, I'm appointing a Senate Task Force on Plutonium Disposition to provide this input from the Senate to the Administration. I'm pleased that Senator DOMENICI has agreed to chair this task force, to continue his leadership on this vital topic.

Also serving on the task force will be Senator RICHARD LUGAR of Indiana, Senator FRANK MURKOWSKI of Alaska, Senator JON KYL of Arizona, Senator CARL LEVIN of Michigan, Senator JEFF BINGAMAN of New Mexico and Senator PATTY MURRAY of Washington. Each of these Members brings knowledge and concern that will be valuable in guiding the Senate on this issue.

As agreements are finalized, the Senate may be called upon to approve programs or provide resources; we will depend on this task force to provide information for informed debates on these subjects.

Disposition of the current 50 tons of Russian excess weapons-grade plutonium is an important national goal. We have a golden window of opportunity to rid the world of materials for thousands of nuclear weapons. We must seize this moment.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Monday, September 28, 1998, the federal debt stood at \$5,525,125,982,443.88 (Five tril-

lion, five hundred twenty-five billion, one hundred twenty-five million, nine hundred eighty-two thousand, four hundred forty-three dollars and eighty-eight cents).

Five years ago, September 28, 1993, the federal debt stood at \$4,386,349,000,000 (Four trillion, three hundred eighty-six billion, three hundred forty-nine million).

Ten years ago, September 28, 1988, the federal debt stood at \$2,587,978,000,000 (Two trillion, five hundred eighty-seven billion, nine hundred seventy-eight million).

Fifteen years ago, September 28, 1983, the federal debt stood at \$1,354,464,000,000 (One trillion, three hundred fifty-four billion, four hundred sixty-four million) which reflects a debt increase of more than \$4 trillion—\$4,170,661,982,443.88 (Four trillion, one hundred seventy billion, six hundred sixty-one million, nine hundred eighty-two thousand, four hundred forty-three dollars and eighty-eight cents) during the past 15 years.

WELLSTONE AMENDMENT TO THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I supported Senator WELLSTONE's amendment to the Higher Education Act and I regret that it was not included in the conference report. The amendment would have increased educational opportunities for people on welfare. It passed the Senate with a bipartisan majority, but was rejected by House Republicans, even though it was also supported by the White House, and by more than 150 social welfare groups.

The goal of this amendment is to correct a serious deficiency in the harsh welfare reform law enacted two years ago. Too often, welfare reform around the country has focused on immediate work experience as a means to achieve financial independence, but the focus is excessive, because it reduced options for welfare recipients who wish to complete to two- or four-year college degrees.

Welfare reform around the country has tended to focus on immediate work experience as a means to achieve financial independence. The new direction of welfare reform at both state and federal levels has generally reduced the options available for welfare recipients who wish to complete a two- or four-year college degree. It is extremely difficult for single parents to be full-time students and work part-time and still give adequate time to their families.

The welfare reform program called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, is based on the idea that work is the best way to achieve independence, especially if the work comes with job security and fair wages. For many people, education is the best road to jobs that achieve these goals. Higher education is often the best way to earn higher wages, achieve independence from welfare, and provide protection from future poverty and unemployment.

Recent studies have found that the average wage for a person who was previously on welfare and then earned a degree is \$11.00 an hour, and that each year of education completed by welfare recipients increases wages by as much as \$1.14 per hour. A study of 4,500 working mothers in the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation found that a college degree is worth an additional \$2.58 per hour for working mothers, compared to the wages of high school graduates. The special importance of higher education for women is emphasized by other data showing that women need a college degree to make the same amount of money that men earn with only a high school education.

The results of these studies are hardly surprising. We know the importance of higher education and the advantages it opens up. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in March 1995 that adult workers with less than a high school diploma earned an annual average of only \$13,697. Adult workers with a high school degree earned \$20,248. With an associates degree, they earned \$26,363, and with a bachelor's degree they earned \$37,224.

The job and career benefits of higher education are also demonstrated by the poverty statistics of the Department of Labor. In 1995 only 1.5 percent of those with a four-year college degree were living in poverty compared to 3.3 percent of those with an associates degree, 6.1 percent of those with a high school diploma, and 17.2 percent of those without a high school diploma.

The evidence for the Wellstone amendment is overwhelming, and a bipartisan majority of the Senate was right to pass it. Under its provisions, 24 months of post-secondary education or vocational educational training would be permissible work activities under welfare reform.

I commend Senator WELLSTONE's leadership on this important issue. States should have the flexibility to create responsible ways to move people from welfare to work, by allowing welfare recipients to include higher education as a part of their effort to achieve financial independence and provide effectively for their families. The House conferees were wrong to reject this positive reform, and we should do all we can to enact it as soon as possible.

CONGRESS NEEDS TO ACT ON HEALTH INSURANCE FOR WORKING FAMILIES

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, this weekend, the New York Times reported on the latest data on Americans without health insurance. According to the Census Bureau, the number of uninsured has now reached 43.4 million of our fellow citizens—an increase of 1.7 million since last year. This increase is on top of the growth in the uninsured of one million last year. The proportion of Americans without health insurance is now higher than it has been

for more than a decade. It is especially ominous that this increase in the number of uninsured has occurred at a time when the economy is strong and joblessness is low.

Congress should be addressing this issue, but the Republican leadership is just not interested. What is important to average families is not important to them. Whether the issue is protecting patients against the abuses of managed care, or protecting the public against the tobacco industry, or saving social security, or raising the minimum wage, or improving education, or closing the loopholes in the campaign financing laws, the Republican leadership just doesn't think it is a priority. Their primary goal is to protect the special interests—not to protect American families.

The plight of workers without health insurance—and of families that may be protected today but could lose their insurance tomorrow—is a particularly compelling example of the need for action. Under President Clinton's leadership, Democrats in Congress have repeatedly tried to address this problem four years ago—Republicans always say, "no." Millions of Americans have suffered because we failed to act. Addressing this crisis is clearly a priority for Democrats and the nation, and it ought to be a priority for Republicans too.

We have taken incremental steps in recent years. We have made it easier for workers who change jobs to keep their health insurance, and we have expanded coverage for children. These efforts were resisted every step of the way by the Republican leadership in Congress. The new Census Bureau report confirms what everyone who deals with this problem already knows—these limited steps, as important as they are, are not nearly enough.

It should be unacceptable that 43 million Americans have no health insurance today. It should be intolerable that no American family can be confident that the health insurance they have today will be there for them tomorrow, if serious illness strikes. It is indefensible that this Congress is doing nothing to keep this problem from getting worse every year.

The vast majority—85%—of uninsured Americans are workers or members of their families. These citizens work hard—40 hours a week, 52 weeks of the year in most cases—but all their hard work cannot buy them the health insurance they need to protect their families, because they can't afford it and their employers won't provide it.

Every uninsured American is an American tragedy waiting to happen. Infants lose their chance to grow up strong and healthy because they do not get basic prenatal and post-natal care. A young family loses its livelihood because a breadwinner cannot afford needed medical care. Middle-aged parents see their savings swept away by a tidal wave of medical debt.

Earlier this year, I proposed legislation that be an important step toward

the day when every job carries with it a guarantee of affordable health care, so that every family can be confident that the quality of its health will not be determined by the amount of its wealth.

Every business is expected to pay a minimum wage, and to obey the child labor laws. Every business is expected to provide safe and healthy working conditions, and to protect against injury on the job through worker's compensation. Every business is expected to contribute to retirement through Social Security, and to the health needs of the elderly through Medicare. It is long past time for businesses also to contribute to the cost of basic health insurance coverage for their workers.

Some small firms may have special problems that call for special solutions. But there is no excuse for large firms to avoid their responsibility to provide affordable health insurance for their workers.

Under the bill I proposed, businesses with 50 or more workers will be required to provide health insurance coverage. Approximately half of all uninsured employees and their families—15 million people—will gain the coverage they need and deserve. This legislation is a giant step toward the day when every American will be guaranteed the fundamental right to health care.

Many—even most—businesses already provide insurance. The vast majority of large businesses fulfill this obligation. But too many others do not. In more and more cases, unfair competition from firms that refuse to provide insurance for their workers is compelling other firms to reduce health benefits or drop coverage altogether.

Health insurance for working Americans does not have to mean complex regulations or excessive government intervention. The legislation I introduced was simple—less than ten pages. It will not cost taxpayers a dime. It includes no specific mandated benefits or burdensome red tape. It simply says that every business with 50 workers or more must offer its employees coverage equal in value to the Blue Cross/Blue Shield Standard Option Plan that is available to every Senator and Representative, and must pay at least 72% of the cost—the same proportion that taxpayers contribute for every member of Congress.

The American people deserve health care for their families that is every bit as good as the health care they provide to every member of Congress. Shame on the Congress for ignoring this need. Shame on the Republican leadership for its misguided priorities.

When the people go to the polls in November, they deserve to know who stands with the special interests and who stands with families who need affordable health coverage.

When the new Congress returns next year, I will do everything I can to assure that health care for every Amer-

ican is as high on that Congress's priority list as it is on the priority list of American families. It is time to end the suffering. It is time for Americans to join every other country in the industrialized world and guarantee its citizens the basic right to health care.

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mr. Williams, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE RECEIVED DURING ADJOURNMENT

Under the authority of the order of the Senate of January 7, 1997, the Secretary of the Senate, on September 29, 1998, during the adjournment of the Senate, received a message from the House of Representatives announcing that House agrees to the report of the committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 6) to extend the authorization of programs under the Higher Education Act of 1965, and for other purposes.

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 11:02 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Hays, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, without amendment:

S. 2071. An act to extend a quarterly financial report program administration by the Secretary of Commerce.

The message also announced the House disagrees to the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 3150) to amend title 11 of the United States Code, and for other purposes, and agrees to the conference asked by the Senate on the disagreeing votes of the Houses thereon; and appoints the following Members as the managers of the conference on the part of the House:

From the Committee on the Judiciary, for consideration of the House's bill and Senate amendment, and modifications committed to conference: Mr. HYDE, Mr. MCCOLLUM, Mr. GEKAS, Mr. GOODLATTE, Mr. BRYANT, Mr. CHABOT, Mr. CONYERS, Mr. NADLER, Mr. BOUCHER, and Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

The following measure was read the second time and placed on the calendar: